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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000723

NOFORN
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NSC FOR DAN SHAPIRO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2019
TAGS: PREL KWBG IS
SUBJECT: MOD MASKING SANSANA SETTLEMENT AS ESHKOLOT
NEIGHBORHOOD

REF: TEL AVIV 0659

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Luis G. Moreno

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On 23 March, Ha'aretz reported and the MOD confirmed that MOD Barak recently approved a plan to declare the non-GOI recognized settlement of Sansana as a neighborhood of the Eshkolot settlement. Based on this approval, the Civil Administration deposited a detailed outline for construction in Sansana, which retroactively legalizes approximately 50 homes, and allows expansion of up to 440 residential units on the site. The MOD plan disregards that the two sites are separated by approximately three kilometers, do not share an access road, have ideologically different populations, and are split by the Separation Barrier. The GOI's attempt to mask Sansana as an Eshkolot neighborhood is unconvincing. The USG has always labeled Sansana as a settlement and Embassy views MOD's recent actions as the GOI's de facto authorization of a new settlement. EconCouns made this point directly to MOD's Roadmap point of contact Oded Hermann on March 23, stressing that we will continue to view current and future construction in Sansana as a violation of the GOI's Roadmap commitment to freeze all settlement activity. End summary.

A New Settlement by any other Name...

¶12. (SBU) On 23 March, Ha'aretz reported and the MOD confirmed that MOD Barak recently authorized the Civil Administration to approve a master plan that classifies the non-GOI recognized Sansana settlement as a neighborhood expansion of the Eshkolot settlement. The plan grants retroactive permits to approximately 50 illegally built homes, and will allow expansion of up to 440 residential units on the site. According to MOD Roadmap POC Oded Hermann, Sansana residents submitted a settlement master plan for approval late last year, when they began planning and constructing approximately 60 permanent structures to replace the trailers in which they currently reside. Alon Cohen Lipschitz of Israeli NGO Bimkom told Econoff on 24 March that the GOI originally sought to legalize Sansana as a municipality of Israel proper, based on the fact that it straddles the Green Line. However, Israeli Courts rejected this plan. (Note: Sansana is one of 17 "green line settlements" proposed by then Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon at the end of 1997 to further "blur" the Green Line. According to USG data and the official Sansana Settlement website (www.sansana.org), Sansana was established as a Nahal settlement in 1997, settled by civilians on Israeli Independence Day in 1999, and converted to a civilian site in 2000, without a GOI-approved master plan. End note.)

Facts Reveal Absurdity of "Neighborhood" Claim

14. (C) On 25 March, Bimkom provided Econoff with aerial-view photos showing an approximate three kilometer separation between the built-up areas of Sansana and Eshkolot. Aerial photography also indicates that several Arab villages are located between the two sites. In addition, the sites are divided by the Separation Barrier surrounding Sansana, and likely will be eventually separated by another section of the Barrier, which the GOI plans to build around Eshkolot. (Note: The aerial maps provided are available on the Embassy's classified website at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv/> under the link titled reporting attachments (ECON). End note.)

15. (C) The sites have separate access road, and lack any direct connecting roads. According to imagery analysis, Sansana residents must travel into Green Line Israel along a circuitous route of approximately 7.5 kilometers to reach the built up area of Eshkolot. In addition, Oded Herrman confirmed to EconCouns that there is not now, and never has been, any infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, etc.) connecting the two sites. According to Ha'aretz, Sansana receives most of its municipal services from the regional council of Bnei Shimon, which is within the Green Line.

16. (SBU) Sansana's religious residents are substantially different in ideology from the predominantly secular, economic settlers of Eshkolot. Despite their petition to join Eshkolot, Sansana's official website (as of 26 March) continues to classify its community as an independent settlement, making no mention of Eshkolot.

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17. (C) Comment: The USG has always viewed Sansana as a settlement, despite the GOI's refusal to recognize it as such. Now, with the approval of its master plan, Sansana is officially recognized as a settlement neighborhood by the GOI. Embassy views this development, regardless of its intent, as satisfying the GOI's political definition of a settlement. It thus constitutes official MOD authorization for establishment of a new settlement. EconCouns made this point clear to MOD POC Hermann, stressing that we will continue to view current and future construction in Sansana as a violation of the GOI's Roadmap commitment to freeze settlement expansion.

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